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ENGL 6154

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University of New Orleans

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ENGLISH 6154
CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITING WORKSHOP
FALL 2015
Richard Goodman

English 6154-602

Richard Goodman

Creative Nonfiction Writing Workshop

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“He [the writer] must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed - love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.”—William Faulkner

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A graduate workshop in advanced creative nonfiction writing.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester,

1. students will have a surer ability to write creative nonfiction. They will be better writers. They will have honed techniques they are acquainted with and explored new techniques as well.
2. students will have become better critics of their colleagues' work. They will be better able to articulate not only what specifically needs improving in a piece of writing but what are its strengths. They will be better literary analysts, widening their range of the aspects of writing they examine.
3. students will have a solid understanding of what exactly is meant by the term “creative nonfiction.” They will be able to discuss and analyze its origins, its development and its techniques. They will be able to cite specific examples of writing to demonstrate this understanding.

4. students will be better able to write a creative nonfiction piece that incorporates research.

MEANS OF ACHIEVING COURSE GOALS:

1. By exposing students to a wide variety of examples of creative nonfiction and of its various sub-genres.
2. By isolating specific techniques used in writing creative nonfiction that make the writing moving, memorable and lasting.
3. By refining the student's command of these techniques through drafts of three works of creative nonfiction. One of these works must require some research.
4. By exploring research and reporting techniques.
5. By refining the student's critical ability through written critiques and line comments on peer's drafts and through giving and receiving constructive criticism in workshop discussion.

This is a workshop. Which means that any piece you submit, by its very nature, is not finished. You're workshopping it because you want to get responses and insights from your peers. This workshop will be an environment where trust and courage are fostered—where we all help one other become better writers.

NOTE: The order and due dates for workshop pieces will be determined during the first workshop. Once they're determined, I will post the schedule on Moodle.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Assignments: Three works of creative nonfiction, approximately 30-60 pages total. I'll be happy to discuss prospective topics and offer suggestions. Participants are free to decide what their subjects and approach will be as well as the lengths of individual works—that is, within limits. If you wish, one or more of these works can be short—five pages or under—so long as the overall page count is met. All work should be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman type, with reasonable—i.e., not to the edges of the paper—margins. Do not single space.

Research: At least one of the three works should incorporate some kind of research. That is, the writer should gain, and share, outside knowledge in the process of writing the work. She or he should learn something that he or she didn't know beforehand, something necessary to the

completion of the work. The research can be formal, involving print and/or electronic resources, or more physical in nature, involving field observation and practical investigation, legwork, interviewing and so on.

CRITIQUES: In a workshop, writers depend on frank, constructive commentary and participation. So it is important that students be well prepared for discussing the work in class and that the critiques they write are ample, specific responses to their fellow students' works in progress. These typed critiques should be a minimum of ½ page, single-spaced. Participants should return to the writer their notated copies of the writer's draft after we've discussed it in workshop. For some, critiquing work in this fashion will be new. Like anything, the more you do it, and do it diligently, the better you'll become at it. I can promise you that.

PLEASE NOTE: Emphasis will be placed on, and considerable time devoted to, accessing and articulating positive aspects of a piece. I do not mean the equivalent of "I really like this," but criticism on a meaningful level, in which the critic brings forward, with specific examples, matters and techniques that are especially successful. These might be comments on word choice, voice, use of dialogue, manipulation of time, scene setting, character development and so on. When you struggle with what makes a piece successful—or parts of it successful—you can better garner that technique for your own writing. Most important, no trashing of work in any form whatsoever. This is a supportive atmosphere. You'll face plenty of hostility in the real world as a writer.

Also: please consider that anything that you read in workshop as confidential. That means you will not show any of that writing to anyone outside of workshop nor will you discuss it with anyone outside of workshop. What's exposed in workshop stays in workshop.

PARTICIPATION: Other appropriate participation includes attending regularly and punctually and having all assigned drafts, revisions, and critiques ready before the class. Pertinent participation in oral discussion will also form a part of your grade.

EVALUATION:

1. **Participation: (10%)**
2. **Critiques: (20%)**
3. **Writing 1, 2 and 3 (70%)**

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

Readings will be posted on Moodle.

ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY: Students must be consistently present and on time. This is a matter of respect for others. You should fully and consistently contribute to the

workshop experience. Repeated absences and lateness—and inconsistent preparation—are unacceptable. Workshops cannot be recreated or “made up.” Therefore, an absence on workshop day is virtually inexcusable—unless, of course, there is a valid excuse. I will be especially hard in this area if a student has had his or her work responded to in workshop—having received the benefit of the effort and the work and the acumen of his or her peers—and then does not show up for workshop days in which his or her colleagues’ work is discussed.

If you know you’re going to be late or miss the class, **please let me know**. Text or call me at 646-267-0532. If you are absent, please make sure that you e-mail the writers who are being workshopped your comments about their work. Also, if you’re being workshopped that next week, it’s your responsibility to provide students with your work.

CONFERENCES: I urge you to make appointments with me during office hours throughout the semester to talk about your work. If you can’t make it during those office hours, we can work something out. I want to meet at least once with everyone individually.

PLAGIARISM AND INTELLECTUAL HONESTY: Plagiarism shouldn’t be an issue at this point in your careers. But the University requires a note about it here. Any instance of plagiarism will be reported to the UNO Committee on Discipline for appropriate action. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is, and its official consequences, check the University’s official word on the subject:

www.uno.edu/student-affairs-enrollment-management/documents/academic-dishonesty-policy-rev2014.pdf

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are required to contact the Office of Disability Services, 248 University Center, (504) 280-6222, to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. This should be done in the first week of the semester. For a full explanation of the University’s policy regarding this matter, please consult this UNO webpage: www.uno.edu/disability-services/

NOTE: Both the UNO Academic Dishonesty and Disability Policy will be posted on Moodle as well.

OTHER RULES: You must turn off your cell-phone/I-Phone/Droid whatever before each class meeting. I do not allow laptops to be open in class except for writing exercises. It’s distracting.

GRADING STANDARDS:

A Excellent, exceptional, original. Thorough and consistently industrious in thought and in craft. Consistently engaging and interesting to read. Sound grammar and mechanics. Clear evidence of labor and polish and highest standards with the refusal to accept the second rate.

B Very good to good. Often industrious in thought and in execution, with obvious attempts at achieving excellence. Sometimes engaging and interesting to read. Sound grammar and mechanics.

C Shows effort but is without particular originality, distinction, thoroughness, or industry in thought, feeling or description. Doesn't steadily maintain reader interest. A rant can be this way, as can telling much and showing little. As can recounting events superficially or from an overly self-involved perspective.

D Minimally adequate in the areas mention above with little evidence of having strived for excellence.

E Not at all adequate in the areas specified above. A weak, lazy paper written carelessly, without any personal investment.